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SUBJECT: WHERE IS BAGHDAD HEADED?

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2834
[B](#). BAGHDAD 2835
[C](#). BAGHDAD 2317
[D](#). BAGHDAD 2318
[E](#). BAGHDAD 1302
[F](#). BAGHDAD 1866

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Baghdad at the end of the summer of 2007 remains a divided city. Since January, the troop surge has helped to create islands of safety and contributed to a reduction in sectarian violence in some areas. However, militant leaders and their cadres who profit from conflict have largely divided the city and immobilized its population inside sectarian enclaves. Most residents cannot safely leave their neighborhoods, including for work or school. Nor can the city's government enter most neighborhoods to deliver basic services, which militant groups often step in to provide (Refs A and B). At the same time, Baghdad's fate remains inextricably linked to national politics -- the inability of local officials to secure their city at the street level often stems from the failure of political leaders to achieve meaningful reconciliation at the national level. This connection is seen most clearly in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), which reflect and reinforce, on the ground in Baghdad, divisions among the sect-based political parties that command them. Other government institutions in Baghdad also often serve the interests of the actors that control them, not the needs of the people and the preservation of the state. Despite the eight-month-long troop surge, Iraq's sectarian factions, in the capital buildings and on the capital's streets, continue to eschew conciliation in favor of confrontation. Most residents blame national leaders for the enduring conflict in Baghdad -- indeed, the fates of Baghdad and the country as a whole are inextricably linked. END SUMMARY.

STREET SOUNDINGS: RESIDENTS FEEL SAFER WITH U.S.
TROOP PRESENCE

[2](#). (C) Local leaders and average residents have confirmed to the Embassy and PRTs that the military surge in Baghdad has dampened violence in some areas over the past eight months. The increased presence of Coalition Forces (CF) has created isolated pockets of safety around the city in which economic activity has re-emerged, including central areas along Haifa Street and Palestine Street. Markets and stores in Karada, Kadhamiya, Rusafa, Sadr City and even a few hotly contested neighborhoods, including Dora, have re-opened. Local contractors and implementing partners of USAID report that they have experienced a significant reduction in attacks against them since January. Contacts report that people feel safer walking through streets and markets in some neighborhoods, like the Yarmouk and Ghazaliya neighborhoods of Mansour district, the Kadhamiya neighborhood of Kadhamiya district, the Karada and Zafaraniya neighborhoods of Karada.

Consumers are buying durable goods, and local merchants report profits on home appliances and furnishings. Some employers in Baghdad report lower absentee rates at work over the past eight months. At the same time, USAID programs have employed a significantly higher number of people for day labor than they did in January, throughout the province.

13. (C) Locals also report the positive impact of several security-related developments on their lives, particularly the clearing by Coalition and Iraqi forces of extremists from some neighborhoods. Contacts convey that neighborhood outposts run by CF have also provided a local address and a human face for Iraqis seeking support in their fight against radicals. Some Sunnis have joined this fight, notably in Ameriya and Abu Ghraib. A few locals have observed as well that CF- and Iraqi Army-patrolled areas of Baghdad contain fewer illegal checkpoints run by militants than it did eight months ago. Many have also noted, more recently, the fact that the annual mass pilgrimage to the Imam Al-Khadim shrine took place on August 9 almost without incident. (NOTE: During the same event in 2005, over 1,000 pilgrims died and a bridge was damaged that has not yet been repaired. END NOTE.)

Other contacts express hope that Baghdad's famed city life may be resurfacing, pointing out boys playing soccer in streets and fields, coffee shops slowly re-filling with men smoking huka pipes, the growing bustle of certain major roads and intersections, and the brief celebration that filled the streets of Baghdad after the Iraqi soccer team won the Asia Cup.

14. (C) In addition to noting these improvements to the economy and security of their neighborhoods, local contacts in areas largely cleared of militants have increasingly engaged with legitimate government offices. Most notably, the Baghdad Governor's office has launched a new initiative

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to bring former insurgents to the meeting table with provincial politicians and leaders of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), a process greatly facilitated by Brigade Combat Teams and EPRTs that arrived with the troop surge. A number of Sunni tribal leaders hitherto outside the political process have also joined this initiative. At the same time, several key Shia leaders have recently defied extremists in their midst by reaching out to provincial leaders. In large part due to the security the troop surge has provided their neighborhoods, a modest number of local council members, provincial leaders, ministry officials and tribal sheikhs have similarly met with former insurgents to discuss and negotiate priorities for improving government services to Baghdad's communities.

...BUT SECTARIAN VIOLENCE, DISPLACEMENT CONTINUE

15. (C) Despite the clearing of militants from some areas, Baghdad residents continue to experience high levels of sectarian and criminal violence, leading to large-scale population displacement. This displacement has in turn caused significant demographic shifts (Refs C and D). Before February 2006, few areas in Baghdad contained a clear Sunni or Shia majority; more than half of Baghdad neighborhoods contained a mixed population. As of September 2007, only about 20 percent of Baghdad neighborhoods remain mixed, nearly all of them in central Baghdad along the Tigris River. More than half of all Baghdad neighborhoods now contain a clear Shia majority. Sunnis have largely fled to outlying areas or have been concentrated into small enclaves surrounded by Shia neighborhoods. This demographic shift has made it easier for Shia militias to push toward a near-complete "cleansing" of the city's Sunnis. Some of our local interlocutors have also argued that this change may have contributed to muted levels of violence, given that few mixed neighborhoods remain. Importantly, contacts also say that, without the troop surge, sectarian displacements in Baghdad would have occurred at a far higher rate.

ISLANDS OF SAFETY SEPARATED BY A SEA OF FEAR

¶16. (C) Lack of security has limited the mobility of Baghdad residents by presenting both physical and psychological barriers to movement outside their own neighborhoods. Damaged bridges, countless checkpoints (both legal and illegal), and road closures due to suspected bombs contribute to traffic jams that discourage intra-city movement. Curfews regularly ban vehicular movement for security reasons. Chronic fuel shortages due to corruption and extortion further undermine mobility. Even when these impediments do not hinder their movement, residents generally consider areas dominated by another sect too dangerous to enter. Pockets of safety are often surrounded by or adjacent to areas controlled by rival sects. These areas include the predominantly Sunni Ghazaliya neighborhood of Mansour, adjacent to the JAM-dominated neighborhood of Shula; or the Shia-majority neighborhood of Zubaida in east Rashid, which is buried in an Al Qaeda-dominated area. Travel is also limited in Baghdad's outlying areas. Sunni farmers in the rural Yusefiya district (qada) cannot bring their produce to the most important nearby markets, in Mahmudiya qada, because they fear the Shia groups in control there. Movement between neighborhoods has become so unusual that residents, security forces and militiamen alike automatically suspect the intentions of strangers -- particularly those they believe to be from a different sect. When they do travel outside their neighborhoods, many Baghdad residents carry both Sunni and Shia identification cards in order to prevent militant attacks, and dress in tattered clothing in order to discourage kidnappers.

DESTROYING BRIDGES, BUILDING WALLS

¶17. (C) Few acts better illustrate Baghdad's division than the destruction of bridges and the construction of walls. Since January, the city has seen much of both phenomena. Terrorists detonated on April 12 a massive truck bomb on a key passage across the Tigris River, the Sarafiya Bridge. Almost exactly one month later, a well-coordinated attack caused the near-simultaneous ruin of key bridges along major routes into and out of Baghdad. These acts damaged more than infrastructure; they also physically and symbolically widened the rift between Baghdad's Shia and Sunni populations (Reftel E). In addition to achieving their strategic goal -- dividing the city -- terrorists accomplished through these devastating attacks their tactical aim of disrupting normal life in Baghdad. They diminished the flow of goods and

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services, which in turn slowed economic reconstruction. They hampered freedom of movement, which considerably exacerbated the traffic problems that already plague commuters in Baghdad.

¶18. (C) Miles of concrete T-walls snake along Baghdad's streets, border its thoroughfares, and divide its neighborhoods. Erected as part of the Baghdad Security Plan to provide the city with safe neighborhoods and markets, these security barriers have in many places achieved their purpose. They have limited the ability of terrorists to detonate car bombs in shopping areas; prevented militias from transporting kidnap victims and weapons into neighborhoods; and diminished the capacity of militants to maraud into adjacent areas. In some neighborhoods, such as Ameriya, these structures appear to have played an important role in precipitating popular revolts against local militants (Reftel F).

¶19. (C) The same barriers that offer protection create division. T-walls limit the natural human exchange that builds neighborhoods into communities, and communities into

cities. In many areas, they also inhibit the transportation and communication necessary for economic vitality. Most importantly, they signal for many Iraqis a resignation to the reality of concrete division. Iraqi politicians have demonstrated a full understanding of the symbolic resonance of walls. On April 22, while attending a conference in Cairo, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ignited controversy when he made comments interpreted as critical of the building of a security barrier in Adhamiya. Notwithstanding the political points their leaders seek to score, most local contacts describe, at present, a preference for the secure division that barriers provide rather than the return to vulnerable exposure that their removal would create. Locals in Baghdad acknowledge, however, that security barriers come with a cost, as described above. They pay it every day.

DIVISION COMES FROM FEAR, NOT HATRED

¶10. (C) Behind closed doors, local contacts from all sects and professions, who are willing to speak to Poloffs and PRToffs, express non-sectarian views. Embassy and PRToffs who have witnessed the opposite phenomenon in other countries in the region (public expressions of unity, private professions of sectarian disdain) note that the division currently characterizing Baghdad seems almost entirely driven by extremists. Fear, not hatred, has forced the people of Baghdad into segregated cantons. Locals often share apocryphal stories that illustrate a popular devotion to tolerance in the face of deliberate attempts to foment hatred. In one such report, a local contact said that members of the Jaish Al-Mahdi (JAM) militia broke into the home of a Shia man in a Shia-majority district of Baghdad. The man's Sunni wife was also present during the break-in. The militia members told the man that they would kill him if he did not divorce his wife immediately. In a show of courage that has entered local folklore, he refused to do so. The militants broke his arms and legs. He still refused. The militiamen left him to die from his injuries. Reportedly, he is now crippled, but still alive.

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BAGHDAD CANNOT BE SECURED BY SECTARIAN NATIONAL
LEADERS
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¶11. (C) The majority of Baghdad residents report, in surveys and in meetings with Emboffs and PRToffs, that the quality of life in Baghdad has stayed the same since January; it has neither improved nor worsened. While there remain many contributors to Baghdad's enduring problems, local contacts continuously point to sectarianism -- and a lack of responsiveness by political parties at the national level -- as the primary factor behind the city's failure. One resident of the Karhk district stated matter-of-factly, "our streets aren't secure because of the parties, not because of us." In interviews, surveys, and focus groups, the majority of Baghdad's citizens characterize their political leaders as representing, first, their personal interests; second, their party's needs; third, their militia's agenda; and, fourth, their sect's perspective. This popular perception reflects not only disappointed expectations, but also an underlying reality of the troop surge in Baghdad: it created a political space that Iraq's leaders have not yet filled.

NATIONAL DIVISIONS, LOCAL FAILURE

¶12. (C) Due to the failure of national leaders to achieve meaningful reconciliation, residents of Baghdad's

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neighborhoods believe they continue to suffer. Instead of a politics based on ideas or issues, Iraq -- and hence Baghdad

-- remains mired in a politics of sectarian identity. The elected leaders of Iraq's Council of Representatives and Baghdad's Provincial Council (PC) do not owe their positions to a particular constituency. Instead, they remain beholden to their political party's leadership. Of the 51 members of the Baghdad PC, 46 belong to national religious Shia parties.

If a citizen in Baghdad seeks to voice concerns to an elected official at the provincial level, he must appeal to a member of these parties. For a large portion of Baghdad's population, that simply is not an option, as many do not identify with the highly sectarian approach of the established parties. Hence Iraq's sect-based parties stand aloof from the streets of Baghdad, and the people living on those streets report that their leaders seem unconcerned and uninformed.

¶13. (C) Participatory democracy flourishes at the district and sub-district levels, but local councils lack the power to change Baghdad. That power resides with the national political parties, and they have repeatedly flexed their muscles in the capital. In 2005, the party-dominated Baghdad PC dissolved the Baghdad City Council, a body made up of representatives of the city's neighborhoods -) not its sectarian factions. Despite a decision by the Administrative Court of Iraq to disallow the PC's action, the PC flatly refused to reinstate the City Council. This refusal sent a clear message to Baghdad's political actors. It demonstrated that national political leadership will permit sectarian actors to behave according to their narrow interests, and not according to the law.

¶14. (C) An uneven commitment to the rule of law at the highest levels, as the case of the disbanded City Council illustrates, reverberates on the streets of Baghdad. Currently, government institutions in Baghdad continue to serve the interests of the actors that control them, not the needs of the people and the preservation of the state. For instance, the sectarian nature of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Baghdad both reflects and reinforces national divisions. In the absence of a unified state, members of the ISF routinely use their positions to serve a particular sectarian or political community, rather than the national interest or the rule of law. The absence of reliable law enforcement accentuates communal divisions because residents are compelled to rely on militants, tribes and political parties for protection, services, and conflict resolution.

¶15. (C) Without competent, impartial security forces, groups with a monopoly on coercion in Baghdad's neighborhoods remain, in effect, above the law. Militants routinely administer bloody "justice" in the backstreets of Baghdad. Moreover, militants intimidate government officials and steal state resources. Sometimes in collusion with the national parties, they often undermine Baghdad's legitimate government by providing essential services such as health care, social welfare, electricity, water, sanitation and, most critical of all, security.

¶16. (C) If Iraq's national leaders can make the compromises necessary to forge a national consensus, then there is hope that this shared commitment will filter into Baghdad, facilitating a return to its multi-sectarian past. If the Shia-dominated parties, religious groups and militias can negotiate their own peace, with each other and with USG assistance, then there is hope that, once united, they may confidently engage minorities without fearing them. These national challenges make it clear that the fate of Baghdad and the future of Iraq as a nation are inextricably linked. As long as Iraq's national leaders fall short in their efforts toward national reconciliation, sectarian groups will continue to plague the streets of Baghdad. And if the center cannot hold, there is little prospect that steps towards reconciliation at the provincial level can be sustained.

CROCKER